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Introduction

Everyone knows that the family is a most important social institution in Asiatic countries such as China, Korea, and Japan. What is not so well, nor so widely understood, is that the idea of the family is deeply involved not only with obligations and duties within a family, but also with such matters as ancestor worship, inheritance and succession, land tenure, public and private holidays, and in certain phases of community organization and of government. It is better therefore to abandon the expression family and substitute for it a term which at the outset suggests the implications and ramifications of the idea of the family. This term is the family system (kazoku seido in Japanese). The Ryukyu Islands have felt the influence of China, Korea, and Japan in many different ways and at different times. Perhaps the most important of these borrowings, ultimately from China, is the family system.

The family system is a series of mutual obligations and duties which members of a living generation of a family owe to one another, to those who have lived before them and who have been responsible directly or indirectly for their present condition and status, and owe also to those who will come after them to perform for their time the tasks now imposed on the contemporary generation.

The family system embraces the same family relationships found in countries of the west. Here as in the west, the biological family, composed of the husband, the wife, and the children, is the fundamental unit of social organization. In American society, family ties beyond the immediate biological family tend to become more fragile, and indeed often become so within the biological family itself--due in part at least to a strong tradition of individualism and greater mobility.

In Okinawa, the biological family is but a segment of a wider system of family relationships. These spread out not only into the contemporary extended families but find expression also in reverence for those who have lived in the past and in a feeling of responsibility for the continuation of the family into the future by assuming one's duty to prevent extinction of the family line. In the so-called ancestor worship, there is this expression of the extension of the family system throughout time. Ancestor worship, the conventional term, is not quite correct, but it conveys the general meaning desired. Actually it is not only the ancestors but all deceased relatives, including child descendants, whose memory is revered.

The family system is a great chain of responsibilities and obligations which extends from the remote past to the remote future and of which the living generation is the responsible contemporary representative. It is this aspect of the family system that makes it more a philosophical, ethical, or social concept than merely the descriptive term for a system

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Individual Families and Their Branches

614 Up to this point, we have been describing the extended families which are composed of the main and the branch families which have descended from a common ancestor. The discussion may now be carried one step further to describe the individual family and its branches.

592 [594] The individual family is the basic unit of village life. Normally this individual family is the biological family, composed of the parents and the children. But it is surprising how often family units or households are made up of relatives other than the biological family to create many varieties in family composition. The numerous deaths, as a result of the war, have added to this variety.

An attempt has been made in the following table to hint at the variation of family composition in the villages and to show this in further detail according to the number of individuals in a family. This table is a compromise, for with so many combinations, it cannot show the full detail without reproducing the composition of each family in each village.

In this analysis, family units have been broken down into three main groups: (1) those with single heads, usually but not always representing older people, (2) those with male heads, and (3) those with female heads.

The grouping of male heads has been further broken down into seven sub-groups: (1) the husband and wife, (2) the husband, wife, and child or children, (3) families with a husband, wife, children, plus other relatives, (4) families with a husband and wife, no children, but with other relatives, (5) the male head with children only, (6) the male head with children and other relatives, and (7) the male head with other relatives only.

Those family units having female heads were subdivided into three groups (1) the mother with a child or children, (2) the mother with child or children, plus other relatives, and (3) the female head with other relatives.

The general category of other relatives was necessary in order to present the materials in compact form. Other relatives most commonly are younger brothers and sisters, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, nephews, or nieces.

The table shows how widely the families vary from the normal biological family. In Hanashiro, only two of the ten units with two in the family are composed of a husband and a wife. Four have female heads with other relatives, meaning generally that women are taking care of

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bers may be recruited and present members expelled. In others, which are closed, membership is automatic and inevitable, depending in no way on the behavior of the individuals involved. We are here concerned with these latter groups whose membership is determined by sex, age, kinship, and rules of residence. Whether an American male lives in Connecticut or California, in the city or the suburbs, is to a large degree a matter of his personal preference. This is not the case for everybody in Taira, although there are people who at any time may leave the village to seek their fortune.

There are two types of households in Taira: those of oldest sons, who live in the house of their parents, and those of younger sons, who establish a nuclear household of their own, which may be near the house of their father. Many young sons, however, leave the central village and settle in its outlying districts or move to the southern part of the island. Whereas formerly many younger sons moved to Japan or to one of its prewar South Pacific mandates, or to Hawaii and South America, since the end of World War II employment opportunities around U.S. Army installations absorb many such migrants. The oldest son is required to live in his parents' house and eventually take over the duties of a household head. Unmarried younger sons remain in the household until they marry or leave the parental home for work elsewhere.

For a woman it is customary to move to her husband's home if he is an older son or into a house in his village if he is a younger son. In the old days this usually involved simply a move in the village, since the preference was to marry a woman from the same community. Nowadays there is no clear-cut preference; a woman from central Taira may become the bride of a man from that part of the village, from one of the outlying parts of Taira, or from another village, usually to the north. Of a sample of 55 marriages, 26 of the wives were from Taira, 29 from other villages, five of which were immediately adjacent.

The composition of the household, therefore, changes for the individual during his lifetime, and it is not the same for all persons in the village. Several children not only have their parents and at least one paternal grandparent but also paternal aunts or uncles who live under the same roof. If the father is a younger son, only one's parents and siblings are household members. Since houses are small and space is very limited, all these members of the household live in close face-to-face relationship. Women tend to outlive men, so that there are many more old women living with their married sons than old men. This is why children have a grandmother more often in the home than a grandfather (see Table 1).

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There is no specific or preferred posture for nursing. While the mothers are in confinement for the brief period following delivery, they often lie next to the baby and feed him. Sitting while nursing is the most common posture, but mothers frequently nurse while standing or squatting. The baby is held loosely and the mother is relaxed. If others are about, she will carry on a lively conversation and occasionally pat the baby gently on or around the region of the buttocks. When alone, she holds the baby with one arm, talks softly, smiles, and with her other hand tugs gently at the baby's limbs. Each feeding is leisurely; the breast is never withdrawn from the infant's mouth. More often than not he suckles his fill and falls asleep.

It is as natural to suckle one's infant at a village meeting as it is to do so in the privacy of one's home. A common sight is that of a mother sitting and listening intently to speeches while cradling her suckling infant loosely in her arms. On buses, in market places, or at large public intervillage gatherings, one is sure to encounter such a scene.

The breast is used to soothe a baby when he is ill, irritable, or in distress from pain. This was quite evident when all the babies in the village were being given a series of innoculations for diphtheria and typhoid. As the injections were given in one large open room, the cries of the infant being innoculated prompted others to cry. Invariably the mother offered the breast to the baby.

After the birth of a child, the mother sits at home during a short rest period, watching happily as neighbors, friends, and relatives continually drop in to admire the newborn. Sipping tea, the visitors offer bits of advice, exchange the latest gossip, ask to hold the infant, and take their leave with the standard phrase: "Take care of yourself." It is a pleasant interlude, but as the family resources begin to dwindle, there is a slight but perceptible change in the attitude of the mother toward her newborn. The constant stream of visitors, for whom tea and some small tidbits must be offered, and her nonparticipation in the regular economic activities prove to be a drain on the family budget, in spite of the fact that the mother and her husband have worked with extra diligence in the months prior to parturition. The mother begins to talk about the approaching feast day and the need to get new clothing for the older children. She asks anxiously about the condition of the firewood market and starts to plan her inevitable resumption of work in the mountains and fields. In spite of her feelings of protectiveness and pity for the young baby, she begins, bit by bit, to reinstate her normal routine. Although she continues to cuddle, kiss, and affectionately nurse the infant, she thinks of the good weather and of how she might have been able to make one more trip to the mountains

before noon but for the fact that she had to return to attend to the infant.

If a grandmother is available, the mother straps the 3-to-4 months old baby onto the grandmother's back in the morning and goes off to the mountains with her husband to haul firewood or to the fields to cultivate sweet potatoes. For the first six months she returns to the house frequently during the day to nurse the infant. It is likely that while the infant demands feeding at short intervals, a mother will work in or around the village. At one of the locations for firewood bundling she can make the bamboo rings, fit the cut wood into them, and stack the bundles.

Throughout the morning hours grandmother, with the infant on her back, wanders about the village. Occasionally she offers her dry breast to the bawling infant who cannot seem to wait until its mother returns from the fields or mountains. If the mother is nearby, she hurries so that the infant does not cry for long. When the hour for lunch approaches, the grandmother hurries home to begin preparations for the noonday meal. As she walks, the infant's head bobs up and down, forward and back precariously, but it continues to sleep undisturbed.

After lunch has been eaten and the infant nursed, the adults in the household sip their tea and rest for an hour or so. Within that hour the mother may play with the infant or nap with it nestled in her arms. Rousing themselves from the noon nap, the adults return to the mountains and fields. The infant is again strapped to the grandmother's back, but this time as she slowly wends her way to the main thoroughfare, she calls out to someone in a house which boasts one of the few clocks in the village. "Hey, what is the time there?" The answer will quicken her pace, for it is near the time for an older sibling to return from school. As she reaches the main street, she joins other grandmothers as well as mothers who are anxiously scanning the direction from which the schoolchildren return. Each admires the infants on the other's back and exchanges timely topics of the day, but as the minutes pass and no children appear, they begin to grumble about the "irresponsible siblings who *must* be playing on their way home." At last the older child returns, and the grandmother hurries home with her charges, promptly transfering the infant onto the back of the older sibling. The old woman rushes to get her hoe and basket, mumbling to herself about the quantity of potatoes she should harvest for the next day's use.

An older child who ignores the crying of his infant charge will be criticized severely by his peers. If the mother happens to be in the

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fields and away from the village, the young caretaker jiggles up and down to soothe the baby on his back. As his cries become frantic, the caretaker's peers will pat him on his buttocks and try to placate him by guiding his fingers to his mouth.

For the nuclear family with no other caretaker except the mother, the newborn proves to be a problem. One such mother complained that she could not do anything efficiently with a baby on her back. She was able to go to the fields to harvest potatoes but had to leave the laden basket until the afternoon to carry it home, for at that time the neighbor's child returned from school to look after the baby. In payment for baby-sitting services she had planned on buying the neighbor's child a dress for the next New Year.

In the nuclear family with school age children, the mother works around the house and in the nearby fields in the morning and rushes off to the mountains when her relief returns in the middle of the afternoon. Thus the infant which brought so much joy to the family and gave its mother respite from the rigorous routine for a short time becomes somewhat of a burden to all. Nevertheless, the baby continues to be indulged, pitied for his helplessness, and the object of affection.

It is important to note, briefly, the father's attitude and behavior during this initial period. Although only females were born during this study, interviews suggest that a male birth elicits a somewhat more solicitous behavior on the part of the father toward both mother and infant than a female one. The father will discourage the mother's early resumption of work and may even feel encouraged to carry the male infant despite the fact that children are deemed "women's work." Ostensibly, however, he seems embarrassed and disinterested in the whole matter be it a male or female. Congratulating visitors find that after a few polite exchanges the father will retire to a corner in the house as attention focuses on mother and child. After sitting out what seems a proper length of time, he will mumble some excuse or other and leave the house to do some chore. The observer visiting the household on the occasion of the birth of a fourth daughter found gloom and disgust in the father's expression. A male visitor who sat trying to convince the father that daughters are quite useful, too, received only contemptuous stares. His wife sat dejectedly holding the infant loosely in her arms. In contrast, a visit of the same purpose to another household on the birth of a fourth daughter revealed similar but notably less intense reactions on the part of the father. Perhaps because of the existence of one male heir he felt less threatened.

There is a tenacious belief in Taira that the female determines the sex of the child. If the woman fails to produce a male heir, the man

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frowned and tugged at the straps that were straining at her neck muscles. 593

At a still later date, Hanako, with her baby sister strapped to her back, played on the beach. At one point, when all the children were scattered over the beach and no one else was nearby, Hanako edged up to the fieldworker and asked, "Would you like this baby, teacher? Here, take her," she said wearily. Asked why she had changed her mind, the little girl smiled shyly, squirmed uncomfortably for a moment, then whispered, "She's too heavy." Her 3-year-old sister, off in the distance at that point, began to scream and cry at being left so far behind. Hanako turned to look back once, then walked on as the 3-year-old squatted on the sand and screamed to be carried. At that moment her mother appeared to nurse the infant, and Hanako ran to her. She bounded swiftly away to the 3-year-old as the mother started to nurse the baby. Returning a few minutes later with the 3-year-old on her back, Hanako deposited her disgustedly, panting heavily from the weight. "Shall we give baby to teacher, Hanako?" asked the mother, and without any hesitation Hanako this time nodded "Yes." The mother laughed and said, "Hah, she has had enough of her already. When the baby was tiny and cute, she was so eager to carry her and wouldn't give her to you, but they all get tired of babies in time." And with that the mother began to rock the baby back and forth in her arms. Smiling affectionately, she kissed and hugged the cooing infant and murmured, "Nobody wants you, eh?" Because she was an unusually outspoken mother she confided, "I think I have had enough too, here, I give her to you!" She laughed as she continued, "How can I make money, feed and clothe the children when I have to rush back from the mountains to nurse this baby." 857 854 [594]

When the child is about 6 months old, he is subjected to a painful operation which prepares him for the introduction to solid foods. The area around the navel is moxa-cauterized. Nine little brown dots in three rows of three attest to the practice of burning a special kind of grass on the skin in this area to protect the infant from various digestive complications. The child thus treated, the mother will begin to supplement breast feedings with rice water, milky white in appearance, that is spooned out of the boiling pot of rice. Sometime later, before the child is about one, bits of sweet potato and special kinds of fish mashed between the fingers are thrust into the mouth of the infant as he sits on his mother's lap at mealtime. Gradually he is given more and more solid foods until, finally, at the age of 2 he is eating rice, unmashed fish, potatoes and vegetables, but nursing is continued until 853 [751] [262] 862 855 262

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855 the mother becomes pregnant. Usually, however, weaning is not
[262] started in earnest until the mother is three months pregnant.

If the infant has a fever or "bad color," he may be subjected to an-
854 other painful experience, blood letting. Incisions are made on those
757 parts of the body which are thought to be affected, and blood is drawn and caught in a cup. The area is washed with sake. The mother often suckles the baby and holds him while the grandmother or some other older person performs the operation.

854 Babies are diapered and swaddled until they are about a year old. For the first two months their wet and soiled diapers are changed frequently; however, as time goes on, less attention is paid to wet diapers, although those soiled from excreta are promptly changed. Infants are checked often during the raw winter days, but because they are bundled so heavily, there is hardly any danger of their contracting colds as their
[164] mothers fear. Severe urine burns and annoying diaper rash are more common than colds among young babies.

[855] Although care is taken to keep the infant as clean as possible during the first year of his life, this attitude changes as the child grows older.
[594] This is in large part due to the mother's inability to devote much time to her offspring once she has resumed full participation in economics activities. Depending on the season of the year, babies are bathed from
[744] every third or fourth day to once a week. They are bathed almost daily during the first two months of their lives as a result of the insistence of the village nurse. Water is heated on the kitchen hearth and poured into a small washpan. Mothers test the warmth of the water by immersing their arms up to the elbows and adding cold or hot water as they see fit. Soap is gently applied either with a soft washcloth or with the hands and rinsed off by splashing. On chilly winter days the bath takes place indoors, but on the hot sunny days it takes place right outside the kitchen door. In drying the baby, the mother places him in a large towel and pats the dampness from his body. She is careful to dry the skin at the joints where rash is likely to erupt. Except for the very poor, all families keep a bottle of talcum powder, which is applied right after the bath. Throughout the bath, the mother talks softly to the baby, smiling and tickling him. The atmosphere of the bath at this
[855] time contrasts sharply with that of a later time when the child is 2 and 3 years old.

863 Although there is hardly any possibility that the infant at this time would be able to smear himself with excreta, the opportunity for doing so is present later when he no longer wears diapers but is still untrained. It rarely happens, as the child is almost constantly watched by a caretaker. One mother reported disgustedly that her infant smeared